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**The Political Implications of the
EU Enlargement to the Baltic States**

TEIJA TIILIKAINEN

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Introduction

The Baltic states are the first former Soviet republics that will join the project of European unification. They will even be the first new members of the EU with unsettled questions with Russia. All of the three Baltic states have declared that membership in the EU is only a partial solution to their present political goals - the full solution being memberships both in the EU and Nato. There are a number of internal as well as external factors linked with the Baltic states due to which the Baltic enlargement of the EU will undoubtedly bring a new political dimension to the EU agenda.

The Baltic enlargement, as a part of the Eastern enlargement of the EU, will pose great challenges to the EU as well as to the new Member States themselves. In this presentation I will focus upon the *political challenges* of the Baltic enlargement. Most of these political challenges originate in the immediate history of the Baltic states as an annexed part of the Soviet Union. They can, however, be divided into two groups on the basis of whether the historical conditions reflect themselves in their *political thinking* and *identity* or in *social and political structures*. A third group of political challenges will consist of those changes that the Baltic enlargement will bring to the EU system concerning its borders and territory as well as its political institutions.

This discussion dealing with the political challenges of the Baltic enlargement of the EU is not in any case meant to understate the political value of the EU enlargement and has therefore to be put into its proper framework. The spread of the project of European integration into the Central and Eastern European new democracies has constituted one of the self-given dimensions of integration since the beginning of the 1990's. Any critical evaluations related to the enlargement almost without exception deal with its various details purporting to contribute to the better adaptation of the EU to the enlargement project. The purpose of this criticism is not to question itself the enlargement.

The division of the Baltic States into two groups as far as the enlargement strategy of the EU is concerned will not be addressed in this article whose core assumption is that in due course all the three Baltic States will be members of the EU.

National Identity in Explaining National Policies

In the stable system of the Cold War subjective factors like national identities did not seem to have much importance as far as the explanation of foreign policies was concerned. It appeared as if systemic factors, factors connected with the bipolar division of powers as the backbone of the international system, could explain a major part of the states' international action. In the 1990's, that has usually been characterised as a period of transition in international politics, a return to national identities has been necessary in order to cope with the vast changes that have made themselves evident after the collapse of the Cold War system¹.

The concept of national identity refers to *the political self-understanding of a nation* as an important basis for its policy and political choices. A national identity is not, as it is usually believed, a unitary phenomenon. It is based upon a number of historical and cultural traditions the interpretation and application of which vary from context to context. As a basis for a foreign policy, national identities express themselves as worldviews, that is, as subjective interpretations concerning the international environment and one's own position in it. These worldviews furthermore express a set of values functioning as the value basis for a given policy.

The key characteristics of the Baltic identities can, consequently, be used when it comes to the understanding of their foreign policies and, at a later stage, of their policies and position as a part of an integrated Europe. The most important aspect of the Baltic national identities is formed by their ways of conceptualising their statehood. The Balts had never consented themselves to the annexation of their territories to the Soviet Union. It was seen as an illegal act the consequence of which being that the Balts believed in the existence of their statehood throughout the occupation². This belief was strengthened by the non-recognition policies of a majority of the Western states as far as the valid title of the Soviet Union over the Baltic territories was concerned.

The refusal of accepting an interruption in their statehood has formed the key basis for all Baltic policies after the restoration of their full sovereignties in the 1990's. The Baltic countries have applied for membership in all of the key Western institutions, not on the basis of a more or less instrumental logic and reasoning, but on the basis of their political identities and historical position on the Western political map³. An Estonian expert, Toivo Kloor, has even claimed that the restoration of the Estonian independence was never seen as a goal in itself by those involved in the liberation movement. According to him it was seen as an important step on the path from being a colony of the USSR to becoming an equal partner in an

integrated Europe⁴.

The cultural and historical right to Westernity, including a place in the Western institutions, does not only explain the speed in which the new Baltic policies were formulated, it even explains the firm determination in which these claims have been introduced to the Western community. The two Baltic states that fell out of the first round of enlargement were among the most obstinate critiques of the Commission proposal and referred to the political character of the decision as well as to the outdated economic statistics that had been used⁵. As membership in the EU is perceived in terms of belonging to a cultural and historical unity it is much more difficult to consent to the differentiation of the three Baltic states in this respect than if it were seen in pure economic terms.

Another important basis for the Baltic foreign policies is formed by the high level of insecurity that is connected with the Baltic states and their territories. The Baltic conceptualisation of threats and security policy objectives differs from the post-Cold War security policy discourse in a majority of the West-European countries. While crises management and prevention has become the main content of Western security policy in the 1990's, the Balts still count on the probability of a territorial threat scenario, where their state structures are threatened by Russia. The high value put on traditional national security is another element that pushes the Baltic states towards the Western institutions. The conception of security is also the element that explains why the Balts are still more interested in a membership in Nato despite of the fact that membership in the EU undoubtedly would lead to much firmer ties and interdependence with the Western community⁶. As long as the Balts, however, are reasoning in terms of traditional security the EU appears to be weak for their purposes as it does not include any guarantees for the territorial security of its members.

On the basis of these political identities, that can be treated as common to the three Baltic States, we can say something about the challenges they will bring to the project of European integration. Treating membership in the Western community as their historical right they will certainly form a group of applicants which are prepared to struggle hard for their memberships and which, on the other hand, won't be pleased with any other solution than full membership. Once in the European Union, the Baltic Countries will do their best in order to qualify for a place in the hard core, whether political or economic, of the EU. The Baltic States, at least if their memberships in Nato will be further postponed, could even be counted to those EU members that are willing to build a collective security system of some genre in the framework of the EU.

The Baltic Question seen from a Russian Perspective

The Baltic integration into the Western security structures appears in a slightly different light if seen from a Russian perspective. It is just this conflict of conceptions which, when politicised, has given reason for a deep mistrust between the Baltic States on the one hand and Russia on the other. Therefore, because of its importance for the situation in general, the conflict shall be briefly analysed here even as far as the Russian interpretation is concerned.

Russian political elites, for their part do not admit their guilty to the fate of Baltic States in connection with the war. They refer to the fact that it was the Soviet Union and its communist regime, and not Russia, that stood behind this policy⁷. The goal of the Russian leadership as far as the new security system is concerned is to create a multipolar world. This would be a world where Russia, together with other great powers like the United States, Germany, France and the United Kingdom, maintains an international balance of power.

Russia treats Nato as a relic from the Cold War which is very badly in conflict with its vision of the new order and works, instead, in favour of a continuing U.S. hegemony. The enlargement of Nato is, according to the most extreme Russian interpretation, seen as a project that purports to isolate Russia and surround it with antagonistic alliances. As a great power Russia considers itself, in any case, entitled to certain spheres of interest to which it counts even the Baltic States. This position can not in any situation be accepted by the Balts - a fact that creates a deep cleavage between the parties.

The Russian conception of the European Union differs remarkably from its view of Nato. In spite of the reinforcement of its security policy dimension the EU is not perceived as a threat to Russia which, consequently, does not oppose its enlargement. The problem is that due to their expectations concerning security guarantees the present EU is not regarded as a sufficient solution by the Baltic States, either.

History Appears in Social and Political Structures

Another political challenge that the EU will face in connection with the Baltic enlargement relates to the currently unsettled problems between the Baltic States and Russia. These problems, even if settled, will include a high risk of conflict between the parties. Russia has been willing to link the two problems, that is, border agreements with the Baltic states and the rights of the Russian minorities in the

Baltic states, while the Balts have emphasised them as separate issues.

When the EU will be enlarged to the Baltic States it will get extensive Russian minorities into its territory. These are minorities whose position and welfare have been declared as an immediate Russian interest. The Russian minorities or their position do not, from a legal point of view, constitute a problem for the EU. In its Opinions upon the applicant countries' capacity to fulfill the conditions for membership the Commission confirmed that all the three Baltic countries present the characteristics of a democracy with stable institutions, guaranteeing the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities⁸. As far as Estonia and Lithuania were concerned the Commission, however, demanded them to accelerate the rate of naturalization of Russian-speaking non-citizens in order to enable them to become better integrated to the society.

From a political point of view the large Russian minorities in Estonia and Latvia, a great deal of which are lacking a Baltic citizenship, do form a great challenge to the EU⁹. At the general level this means that the issue of Russian minorities and their position will enter into the political relations between the EU and the Russia, being able to affect these relations in good and bad. Through the reinforced position of fundamental rights in the EU, and the new capacity given to the European Court of Justice to control the application of these rights, issues related to the Russian minorities will be apt to get a firm status on the EU agenda¹⁰.

The Russian minorities lacking a Baltic citizenship will constitute a challenge to the EU even as far as the EU Citizenship and its further development is concerned. First, Russian minorities lacking a Baltic citizenship will belong to those groups of people living in the EU area that are not entitled to Union citizenship or to the evolving political and economic rights that are vested with it. At this stage, they will be lacking both the right to free movement in the EU area as well as the political rights: the right to vote or to stand as a candidate in EP or municipal elections in the Member State in which one resides. The Russian minorities will constitute an additional element strengthening the criticism against the EU citizenship according to which the EU citizenship reinforces the division of people living in the EU area into different categories. This increasing criticism against the basic conditions of the EU citizenship will be apt to aggravate the development of EU citizenship and an enlargement of it to new political and social rights.

The long and difficult process related to border agreements between the individual Baltic States and Russia is another good example of the Russian willingness to exert its influence on the Baltic States - a willingness that hardly will

end when these states will enter into the European Union. This far, the EU has adopted a neutral attitude towards this specific dispute - the necessity of a valid border agreement with Russia has not been demanded by the EU as a condition for EU membership. It is unclear what the Russian policy in this respect will be after the Baltic States have entered into the EU - whether Russia will be discouraged to continue its manoeuvres against the Baltic States or whether it, on the opposite, feels it has still much more to gain of this kind of politics when the counterpart is the European Union. It is, however, clear that once the Baltic States are in the Union relations between the Baltic States and Russia will form a potential area of tension between the EU and a third state.

The Baltic States as a Part of the Developing EU

In addition to those political challenges that emanate directly from the Baltic history the Baltic enlargement of the EU will pose other challenges related to the general political, and geopolitical, characteristics of this enlargement. The first question to be asked in this connection is whether we can talk about 'a Baltic enlargement' that is, whether there is reason to assume that the Baltic States, once having entered the EU, will form a unitary subgroup of it¹¹.

In spite of the active co-operation that has taken place between the Baltic States in the 1990's there are some crucial differences in their political orientations that might work against their unity. Due to historical and cultural reasons, Lithuania has been more oriented towards Poland, and might see this as a useful relationship even in the EU, whereas Germany has formed the most important Central-European contact for Estonia and Latvia¹². A division of the same type has taken place as far as the Nordic orientation of the Baltic States is concerned. For historical and cultural reasons, Estonia has been most active in its relations with Finland, Latvia with Sweden and Lithuania with Denmark. It is also a common assumption that as members of the EU, the Baltic States would see more advantage in close relations with the Western European than with the Nordic members of the EU¹³.

The Baltic enlargement of the EU would, undoubtedly, strengthen the position and powers of the northern members of the EU in a simple north-south constellation. In spite of their differences, the Baltic States share with other Northern European members like Finland, the same concerns related to their location in the outskirts of the united Europe, in the immediate neighbourhood of an unstable Russia and with a long common border with it. At present, the Baltic States, however, have not given their full support to the evolving programme known as 'The Northern Dimension' which is based upon a Finnish initiative and purports to integrate Russia into

European and global structures through increased cooperation. As the emphasis of the programme lies on energy networks, transport and trade and commercial co-operation it has been criticised in the Baltic States for overriding the Baltic position related to these fields of co-operation with Russia¹⁴.

Next, the implications of a Baltic enlargement of the EU shall be discussed in three contexts. These are the borders and *territorium* of the EU, the political institutions of the EU and EU's common foreign and security policy.

The Baltic Enlargement and the Common EU Territory

When the Baltic States become a part of the common EU territory, that is, a part of the single market and the unification of external borders, there are some issues that will be raised into focus. The first is the detail, that was already mentioned, of a great deal of the population in Estonia and Latvia remaining without access to the single market. The second is the position of the Baltic States as border countries, or gate-keepers, to the EU. The third is the expected activity of the Balts to use the common labour market of the EU - the extent to which the Balts will seek their way to other EU countries.

The total number of population in all the three Baltic States being only around seven million the pressure that they will cause to the common labour markets can not be considered very remarkable. Another detail reinforcing this assumption is the level of unemployment that starts to get stabilised in the Baltic area.

The gate-keeper's position of the Baltic States is a more challenging issue for the EU. As the external borders of the EU, the Baltic eastern borders should be controlled tightly while the abolishing of the border controlling from internal borders should be compensated for by new strategies, and most importantly, by co-operation between different security agencies. At present, the gravest problems concerning border control seem to be directed to the Latvian and Lithuanian border controlling capabilities¹⁵. The problems, most often, originate in a lack of resources and reflect themselves for instance in a huge number of illegal migrants using the Baltic States as their passage to the West. In Latvia, the most problematic border concerning smuggling, contraband and illegal border crossing seem to be that with Belarus, due to the more efficient guarding of the Russian side¹⁶. Even Lithuania has most problems with its border with Belarus.

The state of the Baltic border control as well as the creation of a proper legislation concerning the treatment of illegal immigrants and refugees is in the immediate interest of the EU. The EU's provisions concerning immigrants and asylum were further harmonised in the Amsterdam Treaty and it is therefore a key

condition that national legislations in this area are compatible.

The Baltic Enlargement and the Political Institutions of the EU

The Eastern enlargement, in general, is a great challenge to the political institutions of the EU and as a consequence of this, a number of institutional amendments are being put into effect (Amsterdam Treaty) or, at least, are being planned. The challenges resulting from the Baltic enlargement, in particular, relate themselves to the sizes of the Baltic States and, why not, to the three different languages they will bring to the EU's political and administrative machinery.

The Baltic States will, with their national parameters, belong to the smallest members of the European Union. Already expectations of their future memberships will increase the pressure towards the structure of the Commission as well as towards the voting system, and the system of EU Presidency, related to the Council of Ministers. The Baltic States, of course, are not alone in accelerating institutional reforms in the EU. They, however, become to those newcomers that the current system prevailing would transfer the powers of the EU decisively from its big members to the small ones.

Expectations of the coming Eastern enlargement, and the increasing number of small EU states that it will lead to, have already caused a confrontation between the present large and small members of the EU. The large members have ended up to a proposal, where the number of Commissioners would be separated from the number of Member States and where the Commission would be developed to the direction of an effective European government¹⁷. Small members have insisted on their right to a Commissioner, which they have treated as a necessary element for the legitimacy of the whole organ.

As far as the Council of Ministers is concerned, the large Member States are afraid of losing their dominant position in connection with the Eastern enlargement. One of the concrete propositions made aiming at the balancing of the situation is the German proposition, according to which a system of double majority should be started to be used in Council decision-making, referring to a majority based both on the previous majority of votes and upon a new majority of inhabitants. Another reform that, due to the same reasons, has been proposed to the Council of Ministers relates to the system of Council Presidency, a powerful task that currently is rotating between the fifteen members. Ideas have been put forth about a more limited access to Presidency given to smaller Member States. These questions will be solved in an Intergovernmental Conference already before the first enlargement takes place.

As far as institutional amendments are concerned, the Baltic States are not in a position different from the one of the other newcomers. It is, however, more or less evident that their small size and modest political prestige will be used as heavy arguments in favour of the acceleration of the institutional reforms. It can be objectively doubted whether their developing political system and administration for a long time could bear the burdens for instance of an EU Presidency. The same could be said as far as the Presidency's role in external relations, and in the representation of the EU in international organisations, is concerned.

Last, but not least, the Baltic States will bring to the EU three different languages which all according to the present rules, are entitled to the position of an official language of the EU. The Baltic enlargement could thus function as an ultimate stimulus to a reform of the EU in this respect, in the form of a transfer to a limited number of working languages, if not a decision upon this has been taken earlier.

The Baltic Enlargement and the CFSP

The challenges that the new Baltic members pose to the common foreign and security policy of the European Union are most of all linked with the firm aspirations that these countries have for Nato's security guarantees. The present EU Members for instance are concerned about the willingness of the new non-Nato EU Members to cooperate for the development of the CFSP which, they feel, is seen only a transitional stage on their road to Nato¹⁸.

The enlargement of the EU to new non-Nato countries, like the Baltic countries, has belonged to those factors which have created pressures towards the role of the Western European Union in between the EU and Nato¹⁹. A new membership category 'Associate Partnership' was created to the WEU for Central and East-European countries. This membership category enabled these countries to get involved in the political and operational activities of the WEU with, however, a clear difference to the rights of full members (members of EU and Nato), associate members (Nato but not EU members) or observers (EU but not Nato members). The Maastricht Treaty still included a declaration on Western European Union (Declaration 30, II) according to which *States which are members of the European Union are invited to accede to WEU on conditions to be agreed in accordance with Article XI of the modified Brussels Treaty, or to become observers if they so wish*. The abolishment of this formulation from the Amsterdam Treaty reflects a concern about the new members' willingness to use WEU as a channel to Nato's security guarantees.

The propositions concerning the precision of the WEU's role, and related to the enlargement of the EU, have varied from the separation of WEU's tasks in crises management and those in collective defence to the abolishment of the whole organisation²⁰. The former purports to enable a full participation of the non-Nato members of the EU in the crises management tasks of the WEU without making them a part of the WEU's security guarantees. The latter would lead to the same result by clarifying the institutional labyrinth between the three organisations. Participation in EU's crises management tasks, which in this model would be put into effect by Nato directly, and security guarantees would be two separate things.

In addition to this tension concerning the institutional development of the CFSP the Baltic enlargement will be apt to increase the weight of Russia in this policy-area. In the Amsterdam Treaty, the EU was given some new instruments for the treatment of its major foreign relations. The category of a *common strategy* was established to function as a general policy framework for important foreign policy areas and 'a Russian strategy' is already being prepared in this framework in order to become the first common strategy of the CFSP. Relations between the Baltic States and Russia will later on form one of the major single elements included in this strategy. Secondly, in the Amsterdam Treaty the EU was giving a limited treaty making capacity in the area of foreign and security policy. This is another capacity that might very well be needed for instance when Kaliningrad will become a Russian enclave in the EU.

Conclusions

The Baltic enlargement will bring totally new political challenges to the European Union. The challenges are related to the borders, minorities and political parameters of the Baltic States as well as to their national identities. On the basis of national identities, is it possible to anticipate the capacity of the Baltic people to adapt themselves to the ever deepening European Union? We can use the two Nordic States, Finland and Sweden, as examples in analysing this task.

The Finnish entrance into the EU reminded a lot of the Baltic cases as comprehensive questions like European identity and national security dominated people's expectations. As the decision to join the EU was based upon a more comprehensive basis, the Finnish people have not lost their confidence in integration despite of the fact that a number of the more detailed expectations have not been fulfilled. The idea of a Finnish withdrawal from the EU does not form a political topic in Finland at all. Taking already part in the EMU Finland, on the contrary, is heading towards the hard core of the European Union.

In Sweden, the decision to join the EU was based upon more everyday short term expectations which, when not having been fulfilled, have caused an increasing criticism of the EU membership. The Swedes, in general, are much more sceptical when it comes to the net value of their EU membership. Their decision to stay outside the EMU reflects the fact that integration is not perceived as a comprehensive solution for the country as it is in the Finnish case.

On the basis of this, there is reason to believe that despite of all those difficulties that the EU membership undoubtedly will cause to the Baltic States, their firm aspirations of belonging to the Western Community will carry the people through them. And if the EU will be a disappointment to the Balts they will perhaps be more inclined to change it than to resign the Union.

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Endnotes

1. The distinction between 'objective' and 'subjective' factors in explaining foreign policies has formed one of the key debates in International Relations theory in the 1990's. A good introduction to the theme can be found e.g. in Hollis, Martin & Steve, Smith (1991): *Explaining and Understanding International Relations*, Clarendon Press, Oxford.
2. This conception even reflected itself as the original starting point for the new nationality legislations in the Baltic states in the beginning of 1990's (eg. Ziemele, Ineta 'The Citizenship Issue in the Republic of Latvia' in O'Leary, Siofra & Tiilikainen, Teija eds.(1998), *Citizenship and Nationality in the New Europe*, Sweet & Maxwell, London, 187-204).
3. Concerning the Estonian interpretation of the situation, see eg. Vares, Peeter 'Returning to Europe - A View from Estonia' in Jopp, Mathias & Arnswald, Sven eds. (1998), *The European Union and the Baltic States*, The Finnish Institute of International Affairs & Institut für Europäische Politik, 101-112 and concerning the Latvian case see eg. Ozolina, Zaneta 'Latvia, the EU and Baltic Sea Co-operation' in Jopp & Arnsvald eds. (1998), 113-144.
4. Klaar, Toivo 'Estonia's Security Policy Priorities' in Artéus, Gunnar & Lejins, Atis (eds. 1998): *Baltic Security Looking towards the 21th Century*, Latvian Institute of Foreign Affairs & Försvarshögskolan, 18-32.
5. Eg. Graham Avery & Fraser Cameron (1998): *The Enlargement of the European Union*, Sheffield Academic Press, 122-123.
6. The larger interest in Nato-membership has been confirmed eg. by Gediminas Vitkus (1998) 'At the Crossroads of Alternatives, Lithuanian Security Policies in 1995-97' in Artéus & Lejins and by Daina Bleire (1997) 'Integration of the Baltic States in the European Union: The Latvian Perspective' in Lejins, Atis & Ozolina, Zaneta (1997): *Small States in a Turbulent Environment: The Baltic Perspective*, Latvian Institute of International Affairs, Riga.
7. A brief, but good, analysis of the Russian position can be found in Romare, Ebba Sävborg (1998) 'Rysslands syn på sin säkerhet', *Regeringskansliet*, Stockholm.
8. Avery & Cameron (1998), 69-80.
9. By 1997, of the total Estonian population of 1464 100, approximately one million are Estonian citizens. The corresponding numbers for Latvia are 2490 602 and 1770 000 citizens (Joan Löfgren 'Democratic Stability and Societal Security' in *The Integration of the Baltic States to the EU*, Project Report, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Finland, 1997).
10. In the Amsterdam Treaty the article F2 according to which *The Union shall respect fundamental rights, as guaranteed by the European Convention for the protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, signed in Rome on 4 November 1950 and as they result from the constitutional traditions common to the Member States, as general principles of Community Law* was moved to the controlling powers of the European Court of Justice.
11. A good group of comparison here is formed by the Nordic States which, after the 'Nordic

enlargement of the EU' have shown a larger willingness to individual, rather than to common solutions in large political questions (EMU, support for eastern enlargement etc.).

12. Lejins, Atis 'The Quest for Baltic Unity: Chimera or Reality ?' in Lejins & Ozolina (1997).

13. Their intentions to join Nato can be treated as a concrete fact that makes relations with leading Nato-members of the EU more useful than relations with the Nordic members.

14. The main Finnish newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat* described this criticism in an article, the 2. September 1998 ('The Balts are suspicious towards the Finnish east projects'). It referred to a number of Baltic newspapers that during the summer 1998 had attacked against the Northern Dimension -programme.

15. This is based upon Helena Mannonen 'The Internal Security Field in the Baltics' in *The Integration of the Baltic States to the European Union* (1997).

16. Mannonen, p.44.

17. This proposal would among other things imply that the number of Commissioners is limited to 10-12, that the role of the Commission President is further emphasised and the Commission's parliamentary responsibility reinforced (Tiihonen, Seppo (1998): *Komission hallinnon uudistaminen*, The Ministry of Finance, Helsinki, 61-62).

18. Dannreuther, Roland: *Eastward enlargement, Nato and EU*, Forsvarsstudier 1/1997, Institutt for Forsvarsstudier, Oslo, pp.65.

19. The Maastricht Treaty confirmed the role of the old European defence alliance, the WEU, as an evolving military dimension of the EU deciding to leave all decisions of defence policy to it.

20. Wohlfeld, Monika (1998) 'Closing the gap: WEU and Central European Countries' in Lenzi, Guido (ed) *WEU at fifty*, The Institute for Western European Studies, Paris, 79-82.





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